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1 The social, political, cultural and economic issues raised by digital tools are usually seen from the perspective of highly-educated and wealthy young urban adults in North America and Western Europe. The call for papers for this issue of *Journal des Anthropologues* sought to encourage authors to take a different approach. We wanted them to problematize the challenges raised by digital technologies and their utilization 'at the margin'.

2 Thus, contributors were first asked to seize the significance of the digital technologies outside American and European societies or, at least, at the margins of these societies. What forms does the digital economy take in these spaces? How do individuals adopt products in this economy? Our objective was also to understand how, whether at the 'margin' or in the 'centre' of the global system, minority actors mobilize digital technologies to achieve their social, cultural and political goals, while being conscious of the limits of these mobilizations.

3 We have deliberately opted for the term 'margin', rather than 'periphery'. The latter, as noted by Pierre-Amiel Giraud and Sara Schoonmaker in this volume, has the disadvantage of implying "a space dominated by a centre". Our interest in this concept of 'margin' lies, on the contrary, in the more complex relations that the 'margin' maintains with the centre. This notion refers as much to "relegated spaces" submitted to the power of the centre, as to "relatively autonomous spaces" of experimentation or of 'avant-garde' that escape, in part, from the influence of the centre. Therefore, for this issue of *Journal des Anthropologues*, we wanted to widen the scope as much as possible in order to present the many ways by which digital technologies are appropriated at the margin: whether as an instrument of, or an escape from, domination and control.

4 This introduction highlights a unique transdisciplinary approach forged by the articles gathered in this issue contributed by anthropologists, sociologists, specialists of information and communications sciences and geographers.

The Economy of access to digital technologies

5 To understand how digital technologies are used at the margin, we must first look closely at the conditions of access which are largely influenced by geographic and social inequalities. The map of world internet connections, displayed on the cover of this issue, illustrates such inequalities. The intensity of colour indicates the level of access and thus highlights differences from one country to another: as we can see, vast regions of our planet remain in the dark. This is an elementary dimension that those presenting the emergence of digital technologies as the start of a new era, "the age of access" (Rifkin, 2000), ignore too quickly.

6 In her article, Paula Uimonen seeks to avoid positioning digital technologies as a given. For her, in Sub-Saharian Africa where she carried out her research, the main difficulties for obtaining access to the Internet are the high cost involved and the vagaries of "systemic breakdowns", an everyday occurrence in Africa's technological infrastructure.

7 Contrary to other analyses of the "digital divide" which use only statistical data to assess international and intra-national inequalities, Uimonen's research focuses on the socio-economic and political conditions governing access to the Internet. Taking mobile telephony as her example, she describes how people acquire subscriptions and telephones in an economy based on formal and informal services. Telephone subscriptions are, she points out, particularly expensive and, as a result, low income users try all sorts of tricks to reduce their bills. In addition, because of the dysfunctional infrastructure, they cannot rely on regular access.

8 Hence, this article questions the narrative of UN agencies that accompanied the so-called "mobile revolution" in Sub-Saharan Africa. These agencies were enthusiastic about reducing the digital divide in this region and about the private sector's capacity to ensure efficient service delivery. However, for Uimonen, although private operators, including major transnational telephone companies, have generated enormous financial profits from their investment, users have to pay high prices for malfunctioning services.

9 The Internet access economy in Côte d'Ivoire, as described by Yaya Koné, is also quite specific. He has studied young people in Abidjan's Koumassi neighbourhood who do not own computers and therefore have to go to cybercafés when they want to connect to the Web. They do this by using computers that are usually second-hand machines imported from Europe, known as "*France-au-revoir*" computers.

10 Both Paula Uimonen and Yaya Koné describe how digital technologies are, as with older technologies, exploited by an entrepreneurial culture and, for the most part, deployed through informal market networks. Uimonen mentions the kiosks selling and repairing new and used mobile phones and people selling telephone cards in the street or single phone calls in towns and villages throughout Tanzania, and in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

11 Yaya Koné describes how young people in Koumassi went from selling pirate CDs, VCDs and DVDs to becoming professional *tchatcheurs* on the Internet. In cybercafés, they browse the web searching for lonely hearts in Europe in order to seduce them and then

quietly "pick their pockets" by asking regularly for transfers of small sums of money that they then flash around when going out with their friends in the evening.

12 The digital informal economy described by Koné and Uimonen are subjected to market forces in exactly the same way as the formal market which dominates global regulation of access to electronic networks.

Non-market digital spaces

13 Other authors have taken a quite different perspective and tried to understand how people have access to the digital world, not via a subscription to commercial service providers, as is usually the case, but by making use of non-commercial options.

14 Cédric Calvignac focuses on a community-based alternative to the 'monopoly' held by major Internet service providers (ISPs). The community in question, located in a small town in the suburbs of Toulouse, offers a particularly interesting case study as it focuses on members of a computer club who were "retirees with only limited familiarity with computer tools". The club leaders suggested that these retirees join together and form "a citizen WiFi network", called Cita-nodes. Created in 2003, Cita-nodes meets the specific needs of its users more effectively than commercial access providers: for a modest fee, they receive Internet access and technical assistance adapted to their needs.

15 Meanwhile, Pierre-Amiel Giraud and Sara Schoonmaker have studied non-market access to the digital world from the perspective of free software militants: they underscore the capacity of these militants to "mobilize the margin as a resource" in order to have their ideals respected.

16 They show that, in order to frustrate the commercial ISP market, these militants organized a campaign against Oracle, one of the largest software publishers in the world. In 2009, Oracle bought out Sun Microsystems which held all the intellectual property rights for the free office suite, OpenOffice.org. At the time, Oracle's objective was to develop OpenOffice in a way that was at odds with the ideals of the advocates of freeware. The group of OpenOffice contributors managed to mobilize itself in order to turn its back on OpenOffice and to develop a fork, LibreOffice. They created The Document Foundation specifically to protect and manage use of LibreOffice which they wanted to turn into a "common public good at the margin of the market" that has attracted millions of users throughout the world.

17 The experiments described in these two articles do have their limitations, however. Cédric Calvignac describes how the Cita-nodes network has in fact failed to meet its objective of emancipating users. In principle, Cita-nodes should have given its public "an avenue for civic re-appropriation of techniques" and imbue them with a form of *empowerment*: in fact, "technological control" remained in the hands of the people who set up the project. Although Cita-nodes made it possible for users to avoid being dependent on commercial ISPs, it did not allow them to "not become captive as digital dependents". Similarly, Cita-nodes could not, in the end, compete with the pensioners" preference for the so-called 'triple-play' offers (Internet, television telephone services) provided by mainstream ISPs.

18 Finally, the community of freeware contributors could not escape from the inequalities that structure the world of commercial Internet access: the share of participants in

Southern countries is relatively low. “The distribution of contributors to freeware”, suggest Pierre-Amiel Giraud and Sara Schoonmaker, “clearly demonstrates the digital divide between North and South”.

Unkept *empowerment* promises

19 *Empowerment* has become a key word for describing the hopes for emancipation inspired by the growing significance of digital technologies. Cédric Calvignac has stressed, as mentioned above, the gap between the promises of *empowerment* offered by the citizens’ WiFi project, Cita-nodes, and the real control that its members gained over digital technology. Other articles also focus on this gap between hopes raised and actual results obtained by these digital projects.

20 This is described by Camille Bosqué in her analysis of the international expansion of FabLabs (Fabrication Laboratories) created in the late 1990s by Neil Gershenfeld at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). With *empowerment* as its objective, the FabLabs project invited people “to become protagonists of technology, rather than spectators”. Exporting this model, said Neil Gershenfeld, would facilitate “personal fabrication by everyone on the planet who did not have access to MIT…”. Bosqué focused this study on the way three pioneering FabLabs worked to achieve this objective: FabLab Vygian Ashram in India, MIT-FabLab Norway, and South End Technology Center in Boston.

21 The results of her research show that, despite the “expectations of MIT’s engineers and researchers” and the emphasis on the technology itself, all three FabLabs were grafted onto pre-existing projects and adapted to specific needs in the areas where they were established. In fact, they developed into community centres, rather than into labs focusing on “personal digital fabrication”.

The Digital: between appropriation and domination

22 Anthropologists did not wait for the discourse on *empowerment* by digital technologies to highlight the benefits that they could offer to minority populations. Already in 1991 Faye Ginsburg emphasized that, for *indigenous minority peoples*, minority media were useful “vehicles for internal and external communication, self-determination, and resistance to cultural domination from outside” (Ginsburg, 1991: 92).

23 This is the position taken by Philipp Budka in his research into the use of digital media by “First Nations” communities in North-West Ontario, Canada. He has also put digital access infrastructures at the centre of his arguments. First, he focused his research on one of the first indigenous internet organizations in the world, Keewaytinook Okimakanak Kuh-ke-nah Network (KO-KNET), owned and controlled by indigenous people. To overcome its lack of public and private funding, KO-KNET worked with a variety of actors – governmental institutions, telecommunications industries, local communities, etc. – to install digital infrastructure in the most remote regions of North-West Ontario in order to link them to the rest of the country.

24 Second, Budka reviews the ways in which the local population used digital services. Not only does he discuss their strategic use of digital communication technologies, but he also concentrates on their ordinary day-to-day usage of the Internet. He shows that KO-

KNET network has indeed encouraged the development of tele-medicine and online learning services, but he also highlights the disparity between the 'noble objectives' praised by KO-KNET's state sponsors, who see its network as a way to improve access to education and health services, and people's everyday use of Internet services. Rather than seeing the Internet's mainly as an educational medium, they were more interested, like many others, in having access to sites offering entertainment and social networks.

25 Access to social networks is particularly important for families whose members are often living very far away. Until recently, they were able to use an online service designed specifically for this target group, MyKnet.org, for communicating with distant family members through their personal page. Significantly, just as the Cita-nodes group of pensioners preferred, in the end, to subscribe to commercial services, Philipp Budka shows that recently MyKnetK.org's systems, despite a strong sense of loyalty and belonging by the users, were progressively dethroned by a commercial site, Facebook.

26 Minority media can be used by minority groups as instruments in their struggle against the process of 'cultural domination'. Conversely, dominant media can have 'destructive effects' to indigenous communities (Ginsburg, 1991: 92, 94).

27 In focusing on minority groups' strategic usage of digital technologies as a way to escape various forms of domination, we must not forget that other actors, such as governments and private companies, make use of these same technologies to reinforce their hegemony, by bringing these communities into the national mould, or integrating them into the market.

28 The article by Mathieu Poulin-Lamarre focuses on the Hmong in China and, from this perspective, is particularly eloquent. He shows how the Chinese state has relied on several web platforms to consolidate its "ethnicity regime" and thus ensure the hegemony of the Han majority over the other 55 minority groups composing the Chinese population. This objective is achieved by the production of highly folkloric images representing minority groups as subservient to the Hans. In addition to television, the Chinese state systematically uses the Internet to implant in the minds of its citizens "the natural and authentic character of [ethnic] categories" that it has itself established. Thus, "official minority associations" use the web to promote party doctrine so successfully that they now control "more or less all sites relating to ethnic minorities".

29 Poulin-Lamarre then describes how young Hmongs negotiate their identity on the web. He highlights the discrepancy between, on the one hand, an apparent unanimity under the aegis of the Party which decides on content posted on ethnic minority sites in China and, on the other hand, the much more heterogeneous content posted on personal pages on these same sites or within discussions that take place through the very popular QQ network site. He also discusses the way that the Hmong, despite the precautions they take to mask their identity in public places, deliberately post images showing their ethnic identity on their personal web pages, but they do it in very contradictory ways. In fact, in their posts, 'State-produced images' linking them to a very specific Hmong identity coexist with others that are substantially different from the official 'ethnic model'.

Digital technologies: instruments for political mobilization

30 Since the 1990s, digital technologies have been thought to be indispensable for the political mobilization of marginalized groups. In his article, Pierre Couturier notes that "few political or social struggles in the Industrial society can afford to dispense with digital communications tools". Yet, his contribution offers a case study of a political movement that does not use these tools. He focuses on the struggle by small farmers' collectives in France against the regulation, introduced in the early 2000s, requiring them to use microchips to identify their sheep and goats. This measure, imposed by the European Union and federations of French breeders, is seen by these farmers as an attempt by the dominant agro-food system to force their farms to be integrated into it without taking into account their specificity.

31 Couturier's initial objective was to analyse "how a social group refusing to be integrated into a dominant system" decided to make use of an 'emancipating' – as opposed to a 'dominant' – digital technology for mobilizing its members. However, after interviewing the farmers, he realized that they were not prepared to use tools they saw as "instruments of the system". They preferred to use other forms of "concrete mobilization", such as festivals, demonstrations, and sit-ins in administrative buildings, to "create a living collective" and to "bond together" farmers scattered over a large territory.

32 By showing the merciless impact that electronic identification has had on livestock farmers, its most virulent opponents, and by decrypting their hostility to the potential for contestation provided by digital technologies, Couturier succeeds in moderating the optimism of those who praise the Internet for its ability to emancipate people. He reminds us that digital technologies, in the hands of governmental or international organizations, are first and foremost tools for managing and controlling contemporary society.

33 In her study of MIT-FabLab Norway, Camille Bosqué describes on the contrary how breeders accepted electronic microchips as a way of guaranteeing traceability for their herds: in this case, microchips were considered a useful tool for the future of farmers' livestock. It is true that, in Norway, the *electronic shepherd* was not imposed by government, but introduced by a peer production project. The parallels between these two studies give us an interesting insight into the many ways in which digital tools can be used, according to the objectives of their users, and the environment in which they are implemented.

34 In their article on other marginal groups, but less hostile to digital technologies, Valérie Devillard and Guillaume Le Saulnier describe the contribution of, and limits to, mobilization of these tools for political ends. Time and again, the 'horizontality' of its network infrastructure is a key argument in presenting the web as a more open space than mainstream media for minority groups wanting to make their voice heard. The Internet is often supposed to provide a platform that facilitates access to the public arena (Benkler, 2006: 176-180). Devillard and Le Saulnier present several elements problematizing this argument. Their analysis focuses on the debate in the National Assembly on the draft Law on "reinforcing the struggle against the prostitution system" which reaffirms "France's abolitionist position in this domain" in December

2013. They describe how collective groups that oppose this bill, and in particular the French union of sex workers (STRASS), use the web as a resource for refuting the arguments of abolitionists.

35 Unlike others who see radical structural differences between the web and the media, Devillard and Le Saulnier conclude from their study of the 'traces' of debates on the web that "digital arenas reproduce mass media hierarchies". The abolitionist discourse, promoted by institutional stakeholders supporting this bill, does in fact dominate the debate in these arenas: it is echoed in 'mainstream' media and their online versions since the latter enjoy routine access to these stakeholders. Because they do not have access to these media, the demands of collectives of sex workers and their allies have been marginalized and they can only make their presence felt by "amateur informative productions" hosted by 'pure players' with only the web and their blogs to enhance their visibility.

36 Devillard and Le Saulnier give a detailed description of the strategies used by STRASS to attract greater attention from the 'traditional media' and their online versions which remain a major tool for gaining access to the general public. The authors show how providing the media with what they want in order to increase their audience in digital arenas comes at a cost for their organization. STRASS decided to organize spectacular and dramatic activities which online and traditional media are always ready to publicize. While this move has definitely given the association a higher visibility, the strategy has challenged the coherence of the overall policy it has followed since its creation.

Digital channels of information: from local to transnational

37 Joseph Hivert and Dominique Marchetti have also studied the complex relationships between civil society militants and journalists: in particular, they looked into how the former make use of the latter to gain access to a much wider public. Yet, the framework within which they unfold their arguments is very different from the previous papers.

38 Through their study of the *Association marocaine des droits humains* (Moroccan Association for Human Rights - AMDH), Hivert and Marchetti sought to understand an apparently paradoxical situation. They studied an association "marginalized by the traditional media in Morocco", whose activities in the production and distribution of information could be described as 'Do-It-Yourself militancy'". Yet, for the foreign press, AMDH constitutes an unofficial 'counter-press agency', an alternative to the very official Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP) which is much better equipped in terms of material resources.

39 Unlike other researchers who, immersed with 'technological determinism' perspectives, tend to see "political mobilization as the result of the use of online social networks", Hivert and Marchetti explain how the key to AMDH's activities lies in the 'social' and non-virtual network it has established throughout Morocco since 1979. AMDH's members are not unaware of the benefits in using communications systems: their main tools in recent years have been their magazine, *Attadamoune*, press releases and extensive use of telephone and fax services. However, new technologies have not

been quickly integrated into the "panoply of tools for certain militants, especially those who joined in the 1970s" and who remain somewhat reticent to adopting them.

40 This article offers not only a description of AMDH's use of digital technologies but, more importantly, a clarification of the tacit alliance between AMDH and foreign correspondents. International journalists provide militants with a useful 'safety net' which has proved to be extremely useful when AMDH members are arrested. In addition, the foreign press constitutes a precious resource for overcoming AMDH's difficulties in disseminating information throughout the country, since the association does not have access to the public sphere in Morocco. Through foreign press coverage of its activities, AMDH can "publicize the cause of political prisoners and denounce the repression that is rampant" in the Kingdom of Morocco.

41 However, before establishing this alliance, AMDH has had to made substantial changes to its programme. Established in the 1990s, it has evolved from being a political Marxist-Leninist organization to adopting an 'apolitical' status as an association dedicated to defending human rights. To a certain extent, AMDH has conformed to the expectations of foreign media.

42 On the other hand, AMDH's nation-wide network represents an exceptional source of information in Morocco for international journalists, as it gives them access to news that they cannot find elsewhere because of the way that much of the Moroccan media is 'subordinated' to the political regime. ADMH has another advantage: its militants are often multilingual and have the necessary "cultural and political capital" to "express themselves in ways that are comprehensible to the foreign media".

43 As in the article by Hivert and Marchetti, Kani Tuyala shows how use of digital technologies is part of a continuum with previous forms of communication means. He focuses on the online Pan-African agency for photography and video films, Africa 24 Media, which aims "to give 'Africans' a voice" and to offer an alternative to 'stereotypes' conveyed by "transnational flows of information". To meet this objective, Africa 24 Media takes advantage of digital technologies that facilitate its operations as a 'content aggregator' by using images produced by its own journalists and by a wide network of freelancers and distributing them internationally. But, Africa 24 Media is by no means the child of a spontaneous digital generation: it was co-founded by Salim Amin and sees itself explicitly as the heir to Camerapix, an image agency founded in 1963 by his father, the famous photographer Mohamed (Mo) Amin whose dream was always to promote an alternative image of Africa.

44 As with the development of satellites several decades ago, the growth of digital technologies, says Tuyala, has generated hopes of an improved "dissemination of information" within countries from the South. Thus, Kani Tuyala asks whether the 'Digital Age' has encouraged informational 'contra-flows' (Thussu, 2007) which are now able to rival dominant flows from Western players. He answers by pointing the finger at constraints in the political economy which remain unchanged in the Digital Age, suggesting that it is these constraints, as in the past, that structure transnational movements of information. It is interesting to note that Africa 24 Media's most important news programme, *Africa Journal*, founded by Mohamed Amin in 1994, has been able to reach an international, and indeed an African, audience, only by being transmitted via one of the two principal Anglo-American news agencies, Reuters TV.

The ambiguities of Digital Humanities

45 Finally, in a more theoretical article, Fabien Granjon and Christophe Magis decode the paradigm of digital humanities. As a corollary to the discourses hailing the 'digital revolution', digital humanities have been presented as bringing about a "'new anthropology of contemporary societies". From now on, reality would have to be seen through the prism of the "strongly mediatized character of real-life experiences within these societies, both by the accumulation and the dissemination of knowledge and by the distribution of technologies and, in particular, of digital technologies".

46 Granjon and Magis pay particular attention to the ambiguities within this notion, while seeing elements coming in consonance, in certain directions put forward by these digital humanities, with the preoccupations of critics: for example, questioning the relations "that theory and *praxis* maintain", and challenging the foundations of intellectual property regimes, in calls to go beyond the "balkanization of scientific knowledge".

47 Beyond, the *digital humanities* project poses questions about the boundaries of our contemporary world for which they are expected to offer a new anthropology. There is a high probability that these boundaries will be seen as corresponding almost exactly to the most colourful and lightest colours on the map on the cover of this issue, with the rest of humanity remaining in the dark.

48 Offering a detour by the margins, the articles in this issue allow us to see how, by focusing on some of the dark zones in this map, we can learn more about the issues raised by digital technologies in our world today.

49 Let us conclude by expressing our regret at an unforeseen difficulty. When we published the call for articles, our objective was to invite transdisciplinary contributions that would describe experiences of collaboration between researchers in human or social sciences, artists and digital professionals. We thought that, by confronting our practices as researchers with other forms of activities and creation, we would be launching a critical reappraisal of forms of representation, modelization, and dissemination of knowledge. This would be the framework in which to embed experiments and reflections carried out by collectives coordinated by some of our team: *Anthropologies numériques*[1] and the *antiAtlas of Borders*[2].

50 This confrontation of art, science and technology was expected to lead to a more precise understanding of the issues involved in the growing use of digital technologies in human and social sciences. And yet, apart from the article by Fabien Granjon and Christophe Magis on the impact of digital humanities in research practices, this question has not been treated here, since very few articles sent in response to our call for papers have sought to tackle this issue. This is clear evidence of the extent to which digital practices, together with the methodological and epistemological reflections they inspire, remain, even today, at the margin of our disciplines.

NOTES

1. Digital Anthropologies : http://www.lecube.com/fr/anthropologies-numeriques-3eme-edition_2438
2. http://www.antiatlas.net/en

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